

# *City of Brisbane*

## *Agenda Report*

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council

**FROM:** Community Development Director via City Manager

**SUBJECT:** Sierra Point Design Guidelines Update

**DATE:** Meeting of December 12, 2011

### **City Council Goals:**

To promote economic development that stabilizes and diversifies the tax base. (Goal #4)  
To develop plans and pursue opportunities to enhance open space. (Goal #7)  
To preserve and enhance livability and diversity of neighborhoods. (Goal #14)  
To preserve the unique current character of Brisbane. (Goal # 16)

### **Purpose:**

To provide the City Council with background information on the Sierra Point Design Guidelines Update which will be subject to formal City Council review in 2012. The updated Design Guidelines dated December 2011 have been provided to the City Council and are also available for public review at the Brisbane Library, Brisbane City Hall and on the City of Brisbane web site (<http://www.ci.brisbane.ca.us>) This study session is not a public hearing but rather is intended to provide background information and afford the City Council the opportunity to ask questions and obtain information that will be useful in any future upcoming public hearings scheduled on this matter.

### **Recommendation:**

That the City Council receive and file this report.

### **Sierra Point Design Guidelines Update:**

#### ***Existing Conditions***

The Sierra Point Design Guidelines were originally adopted in the early 1980's to facilitate the development of Sierra Point as a suburban office park. The vision for Sierra Point has remained unchanged for the past 25 years, although the Design Guidelines have been amended from time to time to address particular building sites or design standards. While it has been over 25 years and numerous economic cycles since the overall project was approved, it remains only half built

out. To this day it remains a place that has not lived up to its development potential. On the other hand its track record in providing community benefits is somewhat more positive, although still somewhat mixed. The Marina, Bay Trail and related facilities are important community amenities that have been completed and are enjoyed by residents, workers, and visitors alike. The hotels are an important revenue source to the City. On the other hand, the lack of development has limited the tax revenues generated, the highly anticipated destination restaurant planned near the marina has not come to fruition and the overall project retains an unfinished feeling and character.

### ***Why Update the Design Guidelines?***

In 2005 a number of factors led to the City and community to re-evaluate Sierra Point and its future. City-sponsored placemaking workshops conducted in 2005 by Project for Public Spaces (PPS) identified community concerns regarding the auto-oriented suburban office park model of development and the limited range of public uses and community amenities provided at Sierra Point. The slow pace of development was contrasted with more robust development occurring in other nearby areas, particularly in adjacent South San Francisco. A recurring theme from the workshops was that with its bayside location and attractive setting, Sierra Point offers a great deal of unrealized potential as a community asset and location for business. The conclusions from the PPS Placemaking report pertaining to Sierra Point are attached to this report. The 2005 PPS workshops coincided with renewed private development interest in Sierra Point. The combination of these factors stimulated considerable dialogue and interest in what might be done to improve Sierra Point as both a community amenity and business destination.

### ***Design Guidelines Update Process***

In 2006, the City retained the services of urban design firm Freedman Tung and Sasaki (formerly FTB) to evaluate Sierra Point in light of the concerns stated above, and to update the Design Guidelines as needed. Major objectives of the consultant's work program were to enhance the value of Sierra Point to the community by improving public spaces, providing more opportunities for community use, and developing a stronger sense of place for the project. Other objectives included evaluating the relationship of private development to the public spaces and determining if this relationship could be strengthened to the benefit of both the public and Sierra Point's employees and businesses.

This led to an extensive review process involving workshops with Sierra Point property owners, a joint City Council/Planning Commission workshop, multiple Planning Commission workshops and hearings, as well as several meetings with ad hoc committee formed by the City Council's Economic Development Subcommittee. This ad hoc committee was composed of Councilmember's Conway and Lentz, as well as several community members who have been active participants in the review process to date. A timeline is attached outlining the steps in the process undertaken to date. The draft guidelines are also attached for information.

### ***Design Guidelines Update- Proposed Revisions***

As noted above, the objectives of the update process were to improve public spaces and increase opportunities for public use of Sierra Point and create a stronger sense of identity for the project to the benefit of both the public and businesses.

Substantive changes proposed to guidelines to achieve these objectives include:

- Refinement of the project objectives to incorporate enhanced public use and public space and stronger project identity and sense of place.
- Modification of the Master Plan to incorporate an approximately 1 acre public park/green at the easterly terminus of Sierra Point Parkway at Marina Boulevard, and extension of public green space from this new feature easterly to the bayfront linear park. This feature is intended as the public focal point for Sierra Point, serving as a community gathering space activated by public, visitor and employee usage, and supported by surrounding land uses.
- The illustration of a two property exchanges that would likely be considered to implement the proposed Master Plan (see attached Exhibit). The first involves an exchange of land owned by the City with land owned by UPC and currently planned as a hotel site. The second involves exchanging a leasehold held by a developer (OPUS) on City-owned property at the easterly terminus of Sierra Point Parkway in exchange for a leasehold on a different city-owned site westerly of the newly proposed public park (see attached exhibit).
- Establishment of parameters for the above-referenced land or leasehold exchanges which might be formally considered in the future to implement the updated Design Guidelines.
- Establishment of a vehicular and pedestrian system surrounding the new park which supports the design and function of this new amenity;
- Reconfiguration of buildings surrounding the park to address and support this new feature;
- Design guidelines for the streetscape and buildings surrounding the new park, including specific standards and guidelines to protect the existing linear park along the east and north boundaries;
- Recognition of Sierra Point Parkway as the key gateway into Sierra Point, and design guidelines for streetscape and landscape improvements to upgrade the appearance of this roadway in recognition of its gateway function;
- Establishment of a wayfinding program, a consistent program of signage and interpretation to help the public more easily utilize Sierra Point.

### *Issues of Concern*

As the proposal has moved forward a number of concerns have been raised, and draft design guidelines have been modified to address an number of these issues. A brief summary of the major issues raised to date follows:

- ***The existing Design Guidelines are adequate and there is no need for to change anything.***

*Staff response:* The update process stems from community-based observations that Sierra Point has not lived up to its potential as either a community amenity or business destination, and addressing this fundamental issue is the purpose of the ongoing update process as authorized by the City Council in 2006. Ultimately this as a policy decision for the City Council to make.

- ***The proposed land swap represents a giveaway of City property to private developers.***

*Staff response:* As detailed in previous staff reports regarding this project, a likely means of implementing the Master Plan would involve an exchange of land between the City and the hotel site property owner (UPC) . It would further involve OPUS Corporation exchanging a long term leasehold of City property easterly of Sierra Point Parkway in exchange for the rights to develop on City-owned property westerly of the newly proposed park. State law requires that the City receive full compensation for public lands so there is no gifting of public land to private parties. Any exchange the City would choose to participate in would need to ensure that the City receives remuneration of equal value as determined through an appraisal process.

As a matter of information, the original concept anticipated a swap of OPUS's long term ground lease for fee title ownership of City property. In order to accomplish this, the original concept anticipated not only a property exchange between UPC and the City, but UPC also acquiring some additional acreage (at fair market value) from the City. Both of these elements fueled the perception that the concept constituted "a giveaway" of City land.

In order to address these concerns, the proposed draft guidelines dated December 2011 clearly specifies that the land swap will be based on the exchange of equal acreage. Additionally, any exchange with OPUS will involve a like exchange of land leasehold for land leasehold.

- ***The proposed update is intended solely to facilitate a private development project.***

*Staff response:* Early in the process of updating the design guidelines there was a proposal submitted by UPC for a hotel/condominium project that was based upon the land swap concept originally under consideration. This application was formally withdrawn and there are no pending development application proposals on any of the sites under consideration for either land or leasehold exchange.

- ***The Design Guidelines should not include a land swap.***

*Staff response:* The Design Guideline establishes a land use concept. It does not constitute an action on the part of the City to effectuate a land or leasehold exchange. Any such exchange that might occur in the future would be subject to separate formal City Council action which would establish precise boundaries and limits and include appraisals to determine the value of all property involved to ensure compliance with the requirements of state law. The Design Guidelines recognize the land swap concept as the most likely toll by which to implement the new park, and are intended to establish the basic parameters of any future exchange.

- ***There is no need to exchange Opus's land lease, as that lease will expire and the City will ultimately regain control of that property.***

*Staff response:* The comment is correct. However under the terms of the lease OPUS retains control of that property for another approximately 60 years. It is a policy decision for the City Council to determine whether to maintain the status quo or take action to implement the park concept as proposed.

- ***The new office building on the west end of the park is too large and lacks parking***

*Staff response:* The Design Guidelines illustrate a concept. Actual deal points regarding the square footage, size and design (including parking) of any future building on the west end of the proposed park would be subject to negotiations between the property owner and the City, and would be subject to separate review and approval by the City Council.

- ***The proposed land swap exchanges city property with premium bay views for less desirable property owned by UPC.***

*Staff response:* As noted previously any proposed land exchange would be subject to a formal appraisal, which would quantify the monetary value associated with the various properties under consideration. Whether or not the existing public parking lot areas to be impacted by the proposal provides greater community benefit than the proposed park is a policy matter for the City Council to determine.

- ***Moving the hotel site northerly will impact public use and enjoyment of the linear park along the north edge of Sierra Point***

*Staff response:* Under the original proposal, the proposed hotel site was extended northerly to encompass the entire public parking lot adjacent to the northerly landscaped border. The revised configuration as proposed under the draft Design Guidelines now under consideration maintains an approximately 100 foot-wide buffer from the edge of the newly configured hotel lot and the landscaped area. Additionally, the Design Guidelines will include development standards to ensure that the future hotel is designed to avoid adversely impacting this community amenity, including requirements for a shadow study.

- ***The proposed park is in the wrong place and poorly designed***

*Staff response:* There was extensive discussion through the process regarding the preferred location of the new community space. The concept and location as proposed was recommended by FTB as the preferred location to establish an active public park and community space for a number of reasons. It takes advantage of proximity to Sierra Point Parkway as a gateway, and the dramatic bay views that will be afforded once the leasehold property at the easterly terminus is reconfigured. It further builds upon activities that are already present near the southeasterly corner of the site, such as the Marina, Yacht Club, and Bay Trail. A new public space at this location is also intended to enhance the synergy between existing uses and the potential future uses that may occupy adjacent property (retail liner shops to the south and hotel to the north) as well as non motorized watercraft access point and/or water taxi that may be established at the south end of the Marina.

One of primary lessons of successful place making is to create safe, attractive, comfortable and convenient places for the community to gather and socialize, thereby enhancing the sense of community. A new public space near the Marina could provide a sheltered “outdoor room” framed by surrounding buildings and dynamic Bay views that would provide a place for various community activities. This is in keeping with the principles of successful place making.

The alternate location most often mentioned is the northeasterly corner of the site, near the fishing pier. While this location is afforded excellent bay views, it is also more exposed to the elements, less conveniently located for potential users, situated away from the primary activity center at the south end of Sierra Point, and with less opportunity to benefit from or offer support to convenience retail services at the south end of the site which could enhance the experience of site visitors.

In terms of the proposed design, the intent of the Design Guidelines is to provide a blank slate to accommodate whatever uses and activities the community would desire to see established at this location. A series of small public pavilion buildings were originally shown to illustrate a possible design approach. These have been removed from the current draft guidelines to eliminate any potential confusion that the design guidelines propose buildings in this area. The City Council could subsequently undertake a broad community-based process to design and program a park if established at this location.

- ***No environmental review has been undertaken for the updated Design Guidelines.***

The updated Design Guidelines presents a land use concept. The only “new development” contemplated under the updated guidelines is the new park and the new building on the west end of the proposed park. As noted above, the parameters associated with this building have not been established. If the updated design guidelines are adopted, any project proposed to implement the design guidelines would be subject to environmental review.

#### *Next Steps*

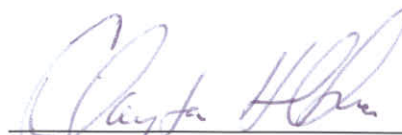
This matter will be set for a public hearing before the City Council.

#### **Attachments:**

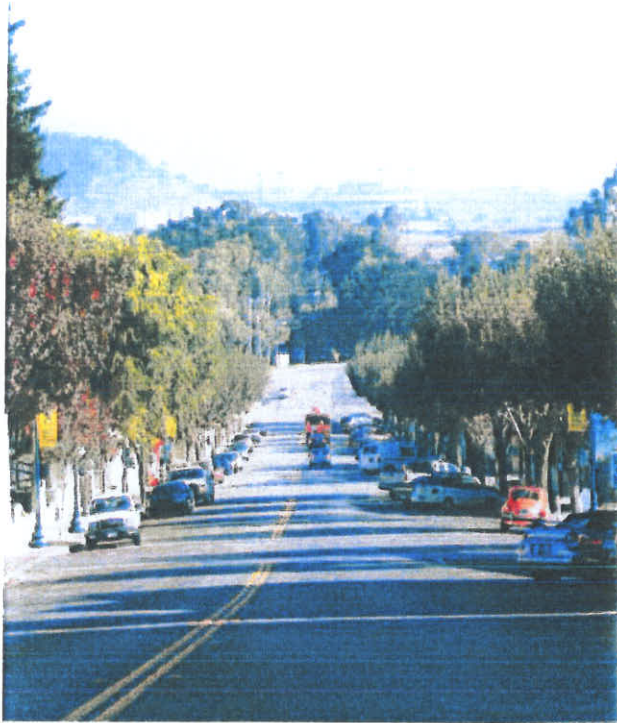
Excerpts from PPS Placemaking Report “Brisbane is Awesome” dated April 2006  
Sierra Point Design Guidelines Update Time Line  
Land Swap Illustration



Community Development Director



City Manager



Brisbane



is Awesome!

DEFINING THE CORE PLACES IN  
DOWNTOWN BRISBANE

PLACE EVALUATION WORKSHOP  
RESULTS

Brisbane  
April 2006

 **PPS**  
PROJECT for  
PUBLIC SPACES

700 Broadway  
New York, NY 10003  
T (212) 620-5660  
F (212) 620-3821  
[www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org)

## SITE 5: SIERRA POINT

### Evaluation of the Place

Participants liked the water, views, wildlife and birds, isolation, quiet, peacefulness, safety and general openness of Sierra Point. People also liked the fact that there was running water on the fishing piers which provided a place to clean fish.

This space, however, is visually and physically dominated by the presence of large office buildings that exhibit little signs of use at times other than the workday, and even then their windows are opaque and create a “blank wall” effect. There are vast open parking lots that, while densely packed during the day, are vacant at night and during the weekend, which gives the area a feeling of desolation and isolation. Workshop participants thought the Master Plan concepts for Sierra Point need redefining.

### Short Term Improvements

Physical improvements recommended by workshop participants for implementation in the short term include:

- Add basic amenities such as trash cans, drinking fountains, benches and directional and informational signage to the public spaces, street corners, and entry points of the site. An informational kiosk could be added here as well to inform visitors about what they are looking at—both on water and in the mountains. People also wanted to have more public bathrooms in the area.
- Open up opportunities to use the water by providing public boat launches, and a kayak or windsurfing rental station.
- Place picnic tables with moveable seating in outdoor sheltered areas by the water.
- Look at Granville Island (in Vancouver) as a possible role model of how a waterfront district can be financially viable.
- Improve connections to central Brisbane, both physically and programmatically. Physical changes would be more long-term but the town could start planning different events to attract people to Sierra Point. Festivals, markets, water shows or other events would connect the town to this area, which is currently underutilized as a gathering space.



Sierra Point.



Existing path, Sierra Point.



Parking lot, Sierra Point.



Information kiosk to orient people, with public bathrooms.



Provide basic amenities such as benches.





*Increase water activities at Sierra Point.*



*Introduce high-speed internet at no cost.*



*Improve lighting along the water.*



*Install telescopes at the fishing pier.*

- Consider providing high-speed internet connections. Several businesspeople who were interviewed on-site said they left the area because there was no DSL. One of the businesses in the area would be a likely partner to make this happen.
- Invite merchants from Brisbane Village to vend food and drinks at Sierra Point during lunch. Rather than everyone driving to the shopping center, the restaurants could come to Sierra Point. Advertise the location of the vendors at Sierra Point businesses.
- This site was seen as a good location to have a possible fish market, which could serve as a regional destination in the area.
- There is currently low lighting in the area; increasing the lighting could improve people's perception of the safety of the area and make it a more attractive place for families to go to.
- Install a coin-operated telescope at the fishing pier and possible other locations.
- Install interpretive signage along the Bay trail highlighting points of interest from a natural, ecological, geographical, cultural and historical perspective. Tell the story of the area in these interpretive signs, bringing the past, present and future alive.
- In general, people wanted to see more activities in this area. There is huge potential due to the location and waterfront access.

## Long Term Improvements

The elements that could be implemented in the longer term, and that should be included in a larger comprehensive plan for this area of the City include:

- Improve the site's connection to central Brisbane through means other than driving. There is currently no link to the town, physically or mentally. Light rail access to the area was also suggested as a way to increase the vitality of this area. Also, consider developing a water taxi from Oyster Point Ferry Terminal to shuttle ferry passengers (Sierra Point workers) to Brisbane marina.
- Introduce a "non-members only" restaurant at the marina.

- Create new sidewalks and pathways to connect the buildings to each other and to the water front to encourage people to walk to the marina during lunch.
- Work with developers and property owners on their site plans for new buildings to ensure that they contribute to the creation of urban street edge with active ground floor retail, rather than following a suburban office park site plan where buildings are set back behind parking lots. Encourage developers to build to the street edge and to limit and/or share curb cuts and driveways. Encourage new development at the water's edge to interact with the water in a suitable way, paying respect to sight lines and water-related ground floor uses.
- Identify options for shared parking among facilities and buildings to limit the amount of asphalt and paving.
- Transform the roads in Sierra Point into landscaped boulevards, with wide sidewalks.
- Infill parking lots with retail uses along the street edges.
- Configure the new development to create a square that would surround a new public space or small "town green."



*Create a non-members restaurant at the marina.*



*Improve connections to Central Brisbane.*



*Develop a water taxi service from Oyster Point Ferry Terminal to Brisbane Marina.*

## VII. PARTNERS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

### NEXT STEPS

The citizens of Brisbane seek to strengthen and improve the key places of the town to reflect the character of their community, and the City is striving to ground the community as it takes on new development challenges, to ensure that the goals of the General Plan are carried through, and to guide all facets of the City's growth, its urban design, and land use planning.

A number of next steps clearly presented themselves as outcomes of this workshop, which could be explored concurrent with the research into funding mechanisms and sources:

- Research the feasibility of and develop a series of traffic circulation guidelines and goals geared toward decreasing speed on Bayshore Boulevard, increasing connections between Central Brisbane and Sierra Point, and public transportation connections with the regional systems in the Bay area.
- Establish a Visitacion Business Merchants Association, with property owners as well as business owners, to maintain and improve the main business corridor in town. They could have a hand in setting up community events in the park and providing a lunch-time vending cart with a number of options for people to enjoy at the park.
- Undertake a master planning effort for creation of a Central Square in Central Brisbane that would focus on relating all major public institutions to one another, the possible creation of a charter high school, the redevelopment of Brisbane Village Shopping Center into a more pedestrian-scaled shopping area, and the success of local business partnerships with merchants on Visitacion Avenue. This would require marketing, education, and partnering with existing and potential property owners.
- More attention needs to be focused upon guiding the build-out of Sierra Point through the development and implementation, by the City, of urban design guidelines and a site plan framework describing a series of desirable alternatives for creating a walkable mixed use community circumscribed around a new, vibrant public park or central square. At the same time, the ideas presented here need to be analyzed in terms of their feasibility for implementation and prioritized.

**A** number of partners – individuals, public agencies, private corporations, civic associations, community groups, professionals and municipal authorities – were cited as key to the successful implementation – in both the long and short term – of the recommendations presented in this report. The tasks which

**Sierra Point Design Guidelines Update- Time Line**

**September 2005-** PPS Placemaking Workshops

Identify Sierra Point as site that has not fulfilled its potential as a community amenity or business destination

**July 2006** City Council meeting

FTB (later FTS) selected to undertake Sierra Point Design Guidelines Update

**Fall 2006** Sierra Point Property Owner Workshops

Discuss potential concepts for update of Design Guidelines

**November 13 2006** Joint City Council/Planning Commission Workshop

Presentation by FTS and feedback to direct further work program

**June 25, 2007** City Council Workshop

Presenting preliminary conclusions of analysis

**August 28, 2008** Planning Commission Public Hearing

Review of Design Guidelines

**September 11, 2008** Planning Commission Public Hearing

Review of Design Guidelines

**October 23, 2008** Planning Commission Public Hearing

Review of Design Guidelines

**November 13, 2008** Planning Commission Public Hearing

Approval of Design Guidelines

**November 9, 2009** City Council Public Hearing

Design Guidelines referred back to staff

**June 21, 2011** Economic Development Subcommittee Ad hoc committee

Review of Design Guidelines Update

**September 15, 2011** Economic Development Subcommittee Ad hoc committee

Site Visit and review of Design Guidelines Update

**October 12, 2011** Economic Development Subcommittee Ad hoc committee

Site Visit and review of Design Guidelines Update



**Proposed  
UPC Land Swap**

-  Existing UPC Parcel
-  Proposed UPC Parcel





Proposed Leasehold Swap





Proposed  
City Owned Area

Proposed  
UPC Parcel  
6.1 acres  
(266,910 sq ft)

Proposed  
City Owned  
Leasehold  
0.8 acre  
(33,750 sq ft)

Proposed  
City Owned Area

Proposed Final Configuration

